LECTURE N 2. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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1. The essence of religion and theories of its formation.

1.1. The introduction to the essence of religion.

Religion is a **universal social institution** in the history of mankind. *Historical, anthropological* and *sociological* research has shown that both traditional and modern societies have their own system of religious beliefs. There is no doubt that the **universality of religion is due to the *essential roles* and *functions* it plays for the life of society.**

In this case, there is a need to study the **essence** of religion, and the **laws of its emergence** and **development** *on the basis of scientific concepts*. As a result of this necessity, various theories have been put forward since the **18th century** that analyzes the ***nature***, ***origin***, ***role*** and ***place*** of religion in society.

These **theories** try to explain the phenomenon of religion in **two main ways:**

- The **main *elements*** of the **structure** of religion;
- The ***role*** and ***function*** of religion in society.

The **structure** of religion takes three main forms:

- **Belief** in a supernatural being;
- Religious **activities**;
- Religious **organizations**.

In other words, to believe in **supernatural beings or forces**, to perform **rites** and **ceremonies**, and finally to unite in religious **groups** in order to express one's beliefs is the essence of religion.

1.2. Concepts related to the essence of religion

The **English anthropologist Edward Burnett Taylor (1832-1917)** described the essence of religion as **"belief in spiritual beings."** Here, the term **"spiritual beings"** is understood **as metaphysical beings (gods, angels, etc.)** who, are believed **to have supernatural powers beyond human comprehension.**

Thoughts that link the essence of religion to the **belief** in god (**monotheistic** religions) or gods (**polytheistic** religions) are also widespread.

1.3. Concepts related to the nature of religion

Researchers of **religious phenomenology** believe that one of the hallmarks of religion is a **sense of holiness or supernaturalism.** Here, the **supernatural manifests itself as a mysterious feeling that creates fear or apprehension in the human spiritual world.** In this sense, the famous **anthropologist Rudolf Otto (1869-1937)** described religion as "the practice of the saint." According to him, religion consists of **man's interaction with a sacred being.** Here, ***religious experience*** is understood as

- the **feeling** of a sacred being,
- the **approach** to it,
- and the **direct experience** of it.

The **functional explanation of the nature of religion** implies the role that religion plays for the individual and society:

- This explanation emphasizes the **features** of religion that **unite society** and **create solidarity** among people who share the same beliefs.
- As for the importance of religion for the individual, it is more related to the **spiritual life** and **psyche of a person**. Thus, religion gives meaning to human life, protects it from spiritual crisis, despair, depression and other psychological problems.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a prominent French sociologist who made a great contribution to the development of the **sociological theory of religion**, believed

that "religion is a system of beliefs and rituals about a sacred being, **uniting believers in a spiritual unity** or religious group, **thus creating social solidarity."** In addition to explaining the essence of religion, this definition also emphasizes its function of **uniting people with spiritual bonds.**

1.4. Theories of the origin of religion.

Theories about the origin of religion have caused serious controversy. These debates are based on different approaches and methodological differences in religious studies. In general, there are **two main directions of the methodological approach to religion in the social sciences**: phenomenological and positivist approaches.

1.4.1. Phenomenological approach to the origin of religion.

In the phenomenological approach, religious phenomena are studied **from the inside**, that is, **from the point of view of believers, and the** *study of the authenticity of religious phenomena is not taken into account.*

As is well known, the objective approach seeks to learn in the context of the principle of religious **neutrality**, assuming that RELIGIOUS FAITH AND BEHAVIOR WILL BE UNDERSTANDABLE ON THE BASIS OF THE **SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES** OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN IT. What matters to researchers approaching religion from this perspective is not that their beliefs are TRUE, but that **their effects on** the ***human psyche, social activities, and society***.

1.4.2. Positivist approach to the origin of religion.

The approach, **based on the philosophy of positivism**, not only understands religious consciousness and activity, but also ***tries to explain its origin*** **on the basis of the methods of natural science**. Thus, it values the system of religious beliefs **as a form of social consciousness formed by evolution from a primitive and mythological worldview.** Here, **religion is seen as a form of social consciousness** that emerged in the **early stages of social development,** a collective illusion, irrational thoughts, **a means of escaping worldly worries and relieving suffering.**

1.4.2.1. Positivist-evolutionist theories of the origin of religion

The **positivist-evolutionist theories** that explain the origin of religion are mainly animism, totemism, fetishism, and naturism (or animatisms).

a) Animism (Living nature)

Animism is the mythological view that **nature and its individual elements** (mountains, trees, the sun, etc.) have a **living, that is, human-like spirit**. Animism, considered a primitive form of religion, consists of the **application of human abilities to nature**. Animist beliefs still exist in primitive tribes (e.g., Australian aborigines).

b) Totemism

Totemism means believing in the existence of a **supernatural relationship between man and a sacred totem** (plant, animal, object, etc.). In this belief system, a special plant or animal totem, this is considered the **great ancestor of humans**, acts as a **symbol of the tribes** and **regulates all social relations of tribal life.** Because the totem is considered sacred, tribes and individuals with the same name also enjoy immunity. According to **Durkheim**, **totemism is the most primitive belief** that forms the origin of all religions.

c) Fetishism (sanctification objects)

Fetishism is the **sanctification of objects with a certain unusual form** and a worldview based on their worship. In fact, *fetishism is a special form of animist worldview*.

d) Naturism or animatism

Naturism or **animatism** is the **personalization of the forces of nature**, the sacralization of events in the physical world, in other words, the worship of nature. The theory of naturism states that in the early stages of social development, people realized that they were helpless in the face of lightning, storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, solar and lunar eclipses, as well as other natural phenomena.

1.4.2.2. Marxism approaches to the origin of religion.

Marxism approaches religion as a social phenomenon and explains its emergence and spread **in the context of real socio-historical relations.** Religion serves the **interests of the ruling classes** by **justifying exploitation and oppression**. When **Marx** said, "Religion is the opium of the people," he was referring to this social function of religion.

1.4.2.3. Other attempts to explain religion.

Materialist and evolutionist theories that try to explain the diversity of religions have been criticized. Because, to date, it has not been possible to objectively substantiate the origin of world religions and primitive religions from the same origin.

On the other hand, alternative explanations have been given for the formation of religion. For example, **Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1956), an Austrian linguist, anthropologist, and pastor of the Catholic Church**, argued that all religions were **based on primitive monotheism**, even in polytheistic religions.

2. Expression forms of religious consciousness.

Religion has emerged as a historical form of public consciousness. It is true that the basis of religious consciousness came from individual consciousness, but when we look at history, we see that all the world's religions have **transcended the boundaries of individual consciousness and acquired a social character.**

Throughout history, religious consciousness has **manifested itself in different forms** in different societies. This diversity is primarily **due to the differences in the socio-cultural foundations** of societies. In general, religious consciousness manifests itself in **three forms of expression**, being *theoretical, practical and social.* The theoretical expression of religious consciousness means religious **beliefs** and **convictions**, the practical expression mean **worship** and **rites**, and the public expression means **religious associations**.

2.1. Theoretical expression of religious consciousness.

The theoretical aspect, which is the basis of religious consciousness, also manifests itself at different levels. Beliefs expressed **in the form of myths in primitive worldviews became "religious doctrines" or theology** in the more advanced stages of culture.

The **theoretical expression** of religious consciousness **covers three topics** of special importance: **god, universe and man.**

In other words, **theological, cosmological, and anthropological concepts** have manifested themselves in the form of **myths, beliefs, and doctrines** in various religions.

Theology deals with the **nature**, attributes, origin, and proof of a god or gods.

In **cosmology**, there are concepts related to the **origin**, development, different stages of the universe, its fate or end.

The **anthropological** discussion of the theoretical expression of religious practice consists of topics related to the **creation** of man, his nature, duty and destiny.

2.2. Practical expression of religious consciousness.

Practical manifestations of religious consciousness **include** rituals, ceremonies, worship, symbols, and various sacrificial rituals **associated with a sacred being**.

There has been much discussion about whether the **theoretical or practical aspect** of religious consciousness **is more important**. As a result, it is accepted that the practical or **ritual aspect** of religious practice is more important **in primary in national religions**, and the **theoretical** (belief) **aspect** of religious consciousness is more important in **universal religions**.

2.3. Public expression of religious consciousness.

Another aspect of religious consciousness is its **social expression**, because religions have the potential to **unite people** in religious groups and associations. The social aspect of religious consciousness is, in fact, the process by which the **individual consciousness rises to the level of public consciousness**. Thus, as a result of the **SPREAD and SOCIALIZATION of subjective religious consciousness**, religion plays an important role **in the FORMATION of the social consciousness** of a group of people or society as a whole.

3. Functions of religion.

The **diversity of sociological *definitions*** of religion, as well as the ***forms of expression of religious consciousness***, means that religion **performs different functions** for the **individual** and **society**.

It is not easy to define the immutable functions of religion for all societies and times. Its social role depends on the ***structure and culture of the society***. For example, in primitive societies that **do not have a state structure, religion performs the function**

of regulating public order, while in **secular states, this function is performed by cultural law**. Thus, the functions of religion are not universal; on the contrary, they are variable and relative. However, it is possible to identify some of the important roles of different historical religions in the past and present **for society and the individual**. Let us consider them mainly in two parts - the *individual* functions of religion and the *social* functions of religion.

3.1. Individual functions of religion.

Religion is very important for the individual because **it gives meaning to his life** and **shapes his worldview.** At all times, people ask, "Why am I here?", "What should I do?", "What will happen after death?" sought answers to questions such as. But outside of religion, there is no other form of worldview that provides concrete answers to these questions. The **theoretical expression of religious consciousness**, as we have seen before, contains answers to questions about *how and why the universe, man, was created, and its destiny, through various belief systems, myths, or religious stories.*

3.1.1. Motivation (spiritual-psychological) function.

Although science has been able to explain many phenomena related to nature, it is not the task of science to explain the meaning and value of life. ***Therefore, many philosophers have acknowledged that only religion, not science, can determine the meaning and purpose of life.*** For example, according to the **famous German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920)**, the main function of religion is to give meaning to life. Because religion **gives special meaning to such situations as suffering, injustice, death, and forms a comprehensive worldview** that meets the **spiritual and psychological needs of the individual**.

3.1.2. The function of belongingness (self-expression).

It is also another individual function of religion to give a person belonging and identity. Man, in accordance with the supernatural force he believes in, determines his own religion or, in short, his identity. Thus, religion serves as a **powerful shield against the identity crisis** that many people face in modern times. Identification is carried out in several ways: traditional, assimilation, search, etc.

3.2. Social functions of religion.

The social functions of religion are also different. The social integration (disintegration), regulatory and legitimizing functions of religion should be emphasized here.

3.2.1. The social integration functions of religion.

The role of religion in social integration and unification has been emphasized by almost all functionalist sociologists. Religion unites people in religious associations and groups through **common beliefs, rituals and ceremonies**. A common worldview and goals make it possible for people to live in a society. **E. Durkheim** stated that social life is possible thanks to religion and stated that religion is, in fact, a **symbolic expression of public life**.

Nevertheless, the integrative function of religion is relative. When religion unites people who share common beliefs, it can lead to negative attitudes and even violence against people of different faiths or non-believers. Such negative roles of religion are called religious dysfunctions. It is known that in history and today there are many conflicts on religious grounds. THAT IS WHY RELIGION CAUSES INTEGRATION OR CONFLICT DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION.

3.2.2. The legitimacy functions of religion.

At the same time, religion has the function of legitimizing and justifying public values, norms and culture. This function in itself determines several directions:

- **preserves** the social structure by sanctifying and interpreting social norms and values, and faithfully plays the role of a healthy foundation for traditions, social norms, and values;
- also **transmits** religious norms and values from generation to generation;
- Religion's definition of good or bad deeds (norms) strengthens the **mechanism of self-control** in people. It also contributes to **ensuring** and strengthening the **public order**.

Finally, it should be noted that the functions of religion in integrating, maintaining public order, or causing unrest, can develop in a positive or negative direction, depending

on the existing ***social, cultural, economic, and political structure of society, and the processes taking place in the geopolitical environment.***

4. Theories concerning to place and role of religion in the modern world.

It is impossible to imagine the history of mankind without religion. For millennia, religious beliefs and ideas have influenced the fate of mankind, the course of history, and in ancient and medieval times, religious organizations were closely linked with all spheres of public life. For example, in the Middle Ages, social institutions in the Western world operated under the control of **the Roman Catholic Church.**

However, with the ***advent of scientific and technological progress***, religious institutions lost their dominant position in society, and people began to turn away from religion. Observing all this, **the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)** declared that **"God is dead"** and that mankind has entered **an age of secularism, including the loss of the importance of religious, moral and spiritual values**. However, there were many thinkers who did not agree with **Nietzsche**. Under the influence of modernization processes in society, several theories have been put forward as a result of heated discussions in the world of science about the future of religion. Let's look at some of them.

4.1. Secularization theory.

The term "secularization" is derived from the Latin word "secularis", which means "secular'. The term "secularization" was first used in history **in the 17th century**. Initially, the term was used to mean the transfer of church land to secular authority. Over time, the concept of secularization has gained wider meanings.

In sociology, secularization means the **liberation of society and individuals from the influence of religion.** According to the theory of secularization, as a result of the development of science and technology and the progress of mankind, the processes of secularization on earth will intensify, and as a result, religion ***will completely disappear as a worldview.*** Even famous Western thinkers such as **August Comte (1798-1857), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Emil Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber (1864-1920)** claimed that the modernization of society will lead to a decrease in the level of religiosity.

In the 20th century, this theory was developed by Western sociologists such as **Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Brian Ronald Wilson (1926-2004), and Thomas Luckmann (1927-2016).**

According to proponents of the theory of secularization, these facts suggest that there is a deep gap between religion and modernity, and that scientific and technological progress will lead to the **one-time removal of religion from the stage of history as a social institution, or at least its weakening role in society.**

4.2. The theory of the transformation of religion.

Proponents of this theory, introduced in the late **20th century**, argue that ***it is wrong to think that religion will disappear as a result of the secularization of society***. According to them:

- Although the position of traditional religious institutions in society has significantly weakened under the influence of secularization and modernization, **religion itself or the way of thinking will not disappear.**
- In modern times, religion does not affect the development of society as in the past, but due to the secularization and progress of society**, it changes its form, acquires a new content and form.**

One of the proponents of this concept is the modern **Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.**

4.3. The theory of the preservation of the importance of religion on an individual level.

According to this theory, the loss of power and importance of religious organizations in society does not mean that individuals themselves turn away from religion. **Despite the sharp decline in the number of church** members and worshipers in the West under the influence of modernization and secularization, many Europeans **believe in God and the existence of the afterlife**. An example of this is **Iceland**, where only a very ***small part*** of the population ***regularly attends church***. However, ***opinion polls*** *show* that **88%** of

Icelanders believe in the hereafter and **40%** in reincarnation. In addition, **82%** of Icelanders seek God's help in their daily lives. The example of Iceland shows that for many Europeans who do not go to church or perform religious rites, their religious outlook **is still important in terms of self-awareness and the meaning of life.** The **modern English sociologist Grace Davy** described this phenomenon as **"believing without belonging,"** that is, expression a belief without belonging to any religious organization. ***Thus, the indifference of Europeans to worship does not mean that they are irreligious.***

4.4. The theory that "secularization is a myth".

According to this theory, there is no solid scientific evidence to support the concept of secularism, and this view is based on more ideological reasons. Some sociologists, such as **Jose Casanova, Rodney William Stark, and Barry Glasner,** have called the theory of secularism a "myth." **Rodney William Stark, a modern American sociologist**, went deeper and suggested that "secularization be buried in the grave of unproven theories."

Stating that the theory of secularization is a fabrication, scholars emphasize that the role of religion in both the daily and socio-political life of the modern world is growing. Today, religious organizations are actively involved in the discussion of issues related to social life, working to form public opinion. In her book 'Social religions in the modern world' **J. Kazanova** gives arguments to prove the active role of religion in the socio-political processes taking place in the world.

P. Berger, an Austrian sociologist who was a well-known proponent of the theory of secularization, later admitted that the arguments for secularization in his works 'Desacralization of the World' and 'The Fall of Secularism' did not justify themselves in most parts of the world. He notes that while globalization may seem like a global phenomenon, it has manifested itself differently in each society.

4.5. Summing up

As we have seen, each of the theories about the place and role of religion in modern society has its strengths and weaknesses. After examining the evidence on which they are based, it is possible to conclude that despite scientific and technological progress and widespread secularization in the world, religion will always exist as a way of thinking.

It is true that in the Middle Ages, many social institutions controlled by religion became secular. Public administration, education, the family, and other public institutions gained independence from religion. Nevertheless, questions such as "Why am I here?", "What is the meaning of my life?", and "Is there life after death?" will always concern mankind. Religion, on the other hand, is a system of beliefs that seeks to provide definitive answers to eternal questions about the meaning of life. This means that the religious worldview will always be important on an individual level.

5. Classifications of religion

In the **19th and 20th centuries,** the academic practice of comparative religion **divided religious belief into philosophically defined categories called world religions**. Some academics studying the subject have divided religions **into three broad categories**:

- **world religions**, a term which refers to transcultural, international religions;
- **indigenous religions** (state), which refers to smaller, culture-specific or nation-specific religious groups;
- **new religious movements**, which refers to recently developed religions.

5.1. Morphological classification of religion

Morphology is the study of the forms, shapes, or structure of things. The **current state of psychological study** about the **nature of religiousness** suggests that it is better to refer to religion as a largely invariant phenomenon that should be distinguished from cultural norms (i.e. religions).

Some scholars classify religions as either **universal religions** that seek worldwide acceptance and actively look for new converts, such as **Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism**, while ethnic religions are identified with a particular ethnic group and do not seek converts.

Others reject the distinction, pointing out that all religious practices, whatever their philosophical origin, are ethnic because they ***come from a particular culture.***

5.2. Demographical classification of religion

The five largest religious groups by world population, estimated to account for **5.8 billion people** and **84% of the population**, are **Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism** (with the relative numbers for Buddhism and Hinduism dependent on the extent of syncretism) and **traditional folk religion**.

6. World of religions (List of religions and spiritual traditions)

6.1. Abrahamic religions

Abrahamic religions are **monotheistic religions** which believe they **descend from Abraham**.

6.1.1. **Judaism**

Judaism is the oldest Abrahamic religion, originating in the people of ancient **Israel** and **Judea**. The **Torah** is its foundational text and is part of the larger text known as the **Tanakh** or **Hebrew Bible**. It is supplemented by oral tradition, set down in written form in later texts such as the **Midrash** and the **Talmud**. Judaism includes a wide corpus of texts, practices, theological positions, and forms of organization. The Jewish people were scattered after the destruction of the **Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE**. Today there are about **20 million Jews**, about 40 percent living in Israel and 40 percent in the United States. The largest Jewish religious movements are **Orthodox, Conservative and Reformist Judaism**.

6.1.2. Christianity

Christianity is based on the life and teachings of **Jesus of Nazareth** (1st century) as presented in the **New Testament**. The **Christian** faith is essentially faith in **Jesus as the Christ**, the **Son of God**, and as **Savior and Lord**. Almost all **Christians** believe in the **Trinity**, which teaches the unity of **Father**, **Son** (**Jesus Christ**), and **Holy Spirit** as three persons in one **Godhead**.

It is the world's largest religion, with about **2.3 billion** followers as of **2015.** The main divisions of Christianity are, according to the number of adherents:

a. The Catholic Church, led by the Bishop of Rome and the bishops worldwide in communion with him, is a communion of 24 Churches sui iuris, including the Latin Church and 23 Eastern Catholic churches, such as the Maronite Catholic Church.

b. Eastern Christianity, which includes Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, and the Church of the East.

c. Protestantism, separated from the Catholic Church in the 16th century Protestant Reformation and is split into thousands of denominations. Major branches of Protestantism include Anglicanism, Baptists, Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Methodism. There are also smaller groups, including: Restorationism, Latter-day Saint movement, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others.

6.1.3. Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on the **Quran**, holy books considered by Muslims to be revealed by God, and the **teachings (hadith)** of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, a major political and religious figure of the **7th century CE**. Islam is based on the unity of all religious philosophies and accepts all of the Abrahamic prophets of Judaism, Christianity and other Abrahamic religions before Muhammad. It is the most widely practiced religion of Southeast Asia, North Africa, Western Asia, and Central Asia, while Muslim-majority countries also exist in parts of South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Europe. There are also several Islamic republics, including Iran, Pakistan, Mauritania, and Afghanistan.

a. Sunni Islam is the largest denomination within Islam and follows the Qur'an and Sunnah.

b. Shia Islam is the second largest denomination of Islam and its adherents believe that Ali succeeded Muhammad and further places emphasis on Muhammad's family.

c. Other denominations of Islam include Muwahhidism, Salafism, Nation of Islam, Ibadi, Sufism, Quranism, Mahdavia, and non-denominational Muslims.

6.1.4. Other monotheistic directions

Whilst Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are commonly seen as the only three Abrahamic faiths, there are smaller and newer traditions which lay claim to the designation as well: Bahai, Samaritanism, Rastafari movement, Druze, Ahmadiya, and others.

6.2. East Asian (or Far Eastern) religions

East Asian religions consist of several religions of East Asia which make use of the concept of **Tao** (in **Chinese**) or **Dō** (in **Japanese** or **Korean**). They include:

- Taoism and Confucianism
- Folk religions

6.3. Indian religions

Indian religions are practiced or were founded in the Indian subcontinent. They are sometimes classified as the **dharmic religions**, as they all feature dharma, the specific law of reality and duties expected according to the religion.

6.3.1. Hinduism

Hinduism is also called **Vaidika Dharma**, the dharma of the Vedas. It is a teaching describing the similar philosophies of **Vaishnavism, Shaivism**, and related groups practiced or founded in the **Indian subcontinent**. Concepts most of them share in common **include karma, caste, reincarnation, mantras, yantras, and darśana**. Hinduism is one of the most ancient of still-active religions, with origins perhaps as far back as prehistoric times. Hinduism is not a monolithic religion but a religious category containing dozens of separate philosophies amalgamated as **Sanātana Dharma**, which is the name by which Hinduism has been known throughout history by its followers.

6.3.2. Jainism

Jainism, taught primarily by **Rishabhanatha** is an ancient Indian religion that prescribes a path of non-violence, truth, and anekantavada for all forms of living beings in this universe; which helps them to eliminate all the Karmas, and hence to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra), that is, achieving nirvana. Jains are founded mostly in India by **Mahavira** in **8th or 7th century BCE**.

6.3.3. Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by **Siddhartha Gautama** in the **5th century BCE**. Buddhists generally agree that **Gotama** aimed to help sentient beings end their suffering (**dukkha**) by understanding the true nature of phenomena, thereby escaping the cycle of suffering and rebirth (**saṃsāra**), that is, achieving **nirvana**. The major schools of Buddhism: **Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana**

6.3.4. Sikhism

Sikhism is a panentheistic religion founded on the teachings of **Guru Nanak** and ten successive Sikh gurus in **15th-century Punjab**. It is the fifth-largest organized religion in the world, with approximately 30 million Sikhs. Sikhs are expected to embody the qualities of a **Sant-Sipāhī**—a saint-soldier, have control over one's internal vices and be able to be constantly immersed in virtues clarified in the **Guru Granth Sahib**. The principal beliefs of Sikhi are faith in **Waheguru**—represented by the phrase ik **ōaṅkār**, meaning one God, who prevails in everything, along with a praxis in which the Sikh is enjoined to engage in social reform through the pursuit of justice for all human beings.

6.4. Indigenous and folk religions

Indigenous religions or **folk religions** refer to a broad category of **traditional religions** that can be characterized by **shamanism**, **animism** and **ancestor worship**. These are religions that are closely associated with a particular group of people, ethnicity or tribe; they often have **no formal creeds or sacred texts.** Some faiths are syncretic, fusing diverse religious beliefs and practices.

- Australian Aboriginal religions.
- Folk religions of the Americas: Native American religions

6.5. Traditional African religions

African traditional religion encompasses the traditional religious beliefs of people in **Africa**. These religions include:

- the Akan, Dahomey, Efik, Odinani, Serer, and Yoruba mythologies In West Africa;
- Bushongo, Mbuti, Lugbara, Dinka, and Lotuko mythologies in central Africa;
- traditions include Akamba, Masai, Malagasy, San, Lozi, Tumbuka, and Zulu mythologies in Southern Africa;
- Bantu mythology is found throughout central, southeast, and southern Africa;
- In North Africa, these traditions include Berber and ancient Egyptian.

- There are also notable **African diasporic religions** practiced in the Americas, such as **Santeria, Candomble, Vodun, Lucumi, Umbanda, and Macumba.**

6.6. Iranian religions

Iranian religions are ancient religions whose roots predate the Islamization of Iran. Nowadays these religions are practiced only by minorities.

- **Zoroastrianism** is based on the teachings of prophet **Zoroaster** in the **6th century BCE**. Zoroastrians worship the creator **Ahura Mazda**. In **Zoroastrianism**, good and evil have distinct sources, with evil trying to destroy the creation of **Mazda**, and good trying to sustain it.
- **Mandaeism** is a monotheistic religion with a strongly dualistic worldview. Mandaeans are sometime labeled as the Last Gnostics.
- **Kurdish religions** include the traditional beliefs of the **Yazidi**, **Alevi**, and **Ahl-e Haqq**.

6.7. New religious movements (List of new religious movements)

- The **Bahai** Faith teaches the unity of all religious philosophies.
- **Cao Đai** is a syncretistic, monotheistic religion, established in **Vietnam** in **1926.**
- **Eckankar** is a pantheistic religion with the purpose of making God an everyday reality in one's life.
- **Epicureanism** is a **Hellenistic philosophy** that is considered by many of its practitioners as a type of (sometimes **non-theistic**) religious identity. It has its own scriptures, a monthly "feast of reason" on the Twentieth, and considers friendship to be holy.
- Hindu reform movements, such as **Ayyavazhi**, **Swaminarayan** Faith and **Ananda Marga**, are examples of new religious movements within Indian religions.
- Japanese new religions (**shinshukyo**) is a general category for a wide variety of religious movements founded in Japan since the **19th century**. These movements share almost nothing in common except the place of their founding. The largest religious movements centered in Japan include **Soka Gakkai**, **Tenrikyo**, and **Seicho-No-Ie** among hundreds of smaller groups.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses**, a non-trinitarian Christian Reformist movement sometimes described as millenarian.
- **Neo-Druidism** is a religion promoting harmony with nature, and drawing on the practices of the druids.
- There are various **Neopagan** movements that attempt to reconstruct or revive ancient pagan practices. These include **Heathenry**, **Hellenism**, and **Kemeticism**.
- **Noahidism** is a monotheistic ideology based on the **Seven Laws of Noah**, and on their traditional interpretations within **Rabbinic Judaism**.
- Some forms of **parody religion** or fiction-based religion like **Jediism, Rastafarianism, Dudeism, "Tolkien religion",** and others often develop their own writings, traditions, and cultural expressions, and end up behaving like traditional religions.
- **Satanism** is a broad category of religions that, for example, worship Satan as a deity (**Theistic Satanism**) or use Satan as a symbol of carnality and earthly values (**LaVeyan Satanism** and The Satanic Temple).
- **Scientology** teaches that people are immortal beings who have forgotten their true nature. Its method of spiritual rehabilitation is a type of counseling known as auditing, in which practitioners aim to consciously re-experience and understand painful or traumatic events and decisions in their past in order to free themselves of their limiting effects.
- **UFO** Religions in which extraterrestrial entities are an element of belief, such as **Raëlism**, **Aetherius Society**, and **Marshall Vian Summers's New Message** from God
- **Unitarian Universalism** is a religion characterized by support for a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and has no accepted creed or theology.
- **Wicca** is a **neo-pagan** religion first popularized in **1954** by **British civil servant Gerald Gardner**, involving the worship of a God and Goddess.

7. Religious radicalism and ways to neutralization it.

7.1. Concepts of radicalism, religious radicalism, religious radicals.

7.1.1. Radicalism.

The term "radicalism" is derived from the Latin word **"radix",** which means **basic**. The term originated in England in the late **18th century** and later spread to Europe in the **19th century**, used in the sense of activities based on socio-political, economic, and cultural **reforms**, as well as **relevant reform practices**. Today, it expresses more and more **extremist** political ideas and **activities** aimed at a **decisive, radical change in political relations**, as well as the main **institutions of the political system.**

Originally used for political purposes, "radicalism" in modern times also applies to groups seeking ***radical change in various fields, including religion***. In this sense, "religious radicalism" or "radical religious groups" are common expressions.

7.1.2. Religious radicalism.

Religious radicalism **is an extremist socio-religious phenomenon** that is intolerant of members of other faiths **by promoting the superiority of religion and its special privileges** (compare with religious exclusivism).

7.1.3. Religious radicals.

Religious radicals, on the other hand, are individuals or groups who **have been influenced by such ideas and disguised as religion**. In fact, while religious radicalism is new as a term, **it is not as new as a social phenomenon**. Throughout history, there have been bloody conflicts on the basis of religion and sect, and the blood of innocent people has been shed.

7.2. Mercy in theory, cruelty in practice.

In general, historically, there have been radicals among members of any religion. For example, zealots appeared in Judaism in the first century, Templers in Christianity, assassins in Islam, and others. The principles of the Abrahamic religions are based on universal, sublime intentions such as love, peace, brotherhood, and justice.

Holy books never call for the killing of members of another religion or for the forcible conversion of people. Both the Torah, the Bible, and the Holy Qur'an recommend treating members of other religions, and people in general, kindly and avoiding violence.

Verse 32 of Surat al-Ma'ida in the Holy Quran states: "Whoever kills a person who has not killed anyone and has not caused corruption in the world, it is as if he has killed all people. Whoever resurrects such a person, he has resurrected all people."

Similar ideas can be found in the Bible book of Judaism: "You were created to teach you that he who kills a man is a murderer of the whole world; He who saves the life of a man will be saved. "- Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:5.

Like other Abrahamic religions, Christianity emphasizes the principles of humanism: "Do not be indebted to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves the other has fulfilled the law ... "(New Testament, Paul's letter to the Romans, 13: 8-10).

But unfortunately, in practice, in most cases, the valuable ideas we listed from the canonical books have not been reflected. Countless crusades and jihadist movements are clear evidence of this.

7.3. Form of expression of religious radicalism: religious fanaticism.

The path to radicalism begins with fanaticism. Fanatic religiosity is born of ignorance. Fanaticism means extreme attachment to any belief or view, intolerance of other ways of thinking. Religious fanaticism is the blind, over-attached, and unconditional adherence to religious ideas that excludes any critical approach.

7.4. Causes of religious radicalism.

7.4.1. Illiteracy, especially religious illiteracy.

Where there is ignorance and superstition, the spread of religious radicalism is inevitable. Science and education are necessary to prevent such an environment. Lack of religious education at any level or misdirection of trained personnel leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion.

7.4.2. Psychological problems.

Social groups that have not confirmed themselves in the social environment, especially young people, are increasingly isolated and distanced from society. This alienation creates spiritual poverty in them, destroys empathy, that is, the feeling of putting others in their place. Also, not being able to solve problems creates a complex of imperfections in people, and in such a psychological state, they easily fall victim to the propaganda of radicals. Because the radicals first instill a sense of self-confidence in the other in order to take over the other.

7.4.3. Weak participation in world integration processes.

Favorable conditions for radicalism are created in countries outside the processes of globalization and integration. In Muslim-majority regions, the population leads a traditional patriarchal lifestyle. This factor is very favorable for radical movements because the religious concepts they put forward are based on conservatism.

7.4.4. **Socio-political injustice.**

In an environment where civil society is absent and the political and social system fails to create a just society, the emergence of religious radicalism is unavoidable. Dissatisfaction arising from negative societal events is artfully exploited by different radical groups, influencing the course of socio-political occurrences.

7.5. Risk groups exposed to religious radicalism

The following risk groups are widely used as a tool of religious protest against the existing social problems in the propaganda of radical groups in an environment of unemployment and poverty: youth; immature, without life experience; religiously ignorant; emotional, sociopathic; Individuals and groups dissatisfied with their social status.

7.6. Methods and forms of propaganda of radical groups, funding, organizational structures.

Purposeful methods and forms of propaganda, funding, and organizational structures of radical groups are quite large and complex processes. For example, if we study the disruptive and subversive activities of the intelligence agencies of the neighboring countries, which skillfully use these points against the Republic of Azerbaijan, as an additional issue, we can highlight quite interesting points. In any case, it is very important to systematize the most important of these issues.

7.6.1. Working categories of propaganda of radical groups.

Extremist ideas, such as jihad, “martyrdom,” or “eternal salvation,” play a role in compensating for worldly deprivations.

7.6.2. The propaganda space of radical groups.

Extremist and radical groups spread their ideas globally, mainly through **social networks**, and use them to attract new followers. Such groups seek to undermine national and religious values and directly or indirectly call for violence. Young people formed under the influence of such propaganda abandon common values, ***move away from education and self-improvement.***

7.6.3. The concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism”.

Although the words “radicalism” and “extremism” are used interchangeably today, there are terminological differences between them. The biggest difference between extremism and radicalism is the **implementation of extremist ideas by violent methods**. In other words, every extremist is a radical, but not every radical is an extremist.

Religious extremism manifests itself in intolerance of members of different religions or in fierce interfaith confrontation. Religious extremism is always an open and potential enemy of the “other”, but it is based on the principle that you can trust “your own”. A religious extremist organization is an *institution established for the purpose of carrying out religious extremist activities or carrying out such activities in order to achieve its goals.*

7.6.4. The last stage of religious radicalism and extremism is terrorism.

Terrorism is the use of ideologically motivated provocations, assassinations, hostages, or other violent, cruel methods (terrorist acts) to achieve political goals and insidious intentions.

Terrorist - a person involved in the implementation of an act of terrorism in any form; terrorist group - a combination of two or more persons for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities.

Terrorist organization means an organization established for the purpose of committing an act of terrorism or which deems it possible to use terrorism in its activities.

7.7. Methods of neutralization religious radicalism and extremism.

Today, no country and no one is insured against religious radicalism and extremism, including terrorism. Therefore, the fight against them should be one of the main tasks of every state and everyone. But how and what methods of struggle should be used?

7.7.1. Enlightenment method.

Since it is easy to manage an illiterate person and direct him in any direction, the first way to protect people from the influence of radicals is to **carry out educational work.**

Education ensures the growth of the individual and society in all spheres, provides people with skills and talents by providing the necessary information, instills high moral values, protects them from bad habits and behaviors, and acquires good qualities. For this reason, religion attaches great importance to science, reading and learning. It is no

coincidence that the first commandment of the Qur'an, which was sent to guide people, was "reading" (Surat al-A'laq, 1).

Using the most authoritative religious sources and their correct interpretation makes the other main method called religious enlightenment relevant.

7.7.2. Prevention method.

It is an **explanatory work** with people who are in danger of being exposed to radical currents. Especially if young people and teenagers are just under the influence of radical, extremist elements, it is necessary to take immediate action. Those *who apply the preventive m*ethod *must have a deep knowledge of both human psychology and religion*, as well as have a high reputation among the people, be recognized as a moral and exemplary person.

7.7.3. Administrative method.

In the fight against religious radicalism, the administrative method can be used at the last moment. So, if the activities of radical forces are of a criminal nature, then the fight against them is carried out by law enforcement agencies.

This is the only future prosperity of mankind. Everyone, no matter where they are or who they are, must condemn violence, radicalism, and terrorism, which are a great threat to humanity, and strive to create an environment in which everything is resolved in a spirit of mutual understanding and peace in all social environments, from the family to society.

1. Problems of religious diversity

Religious diversity can fruitfully be explored in many ways—for instance, from **psychological**, **anthropological**, or **historical *perspectives***.

Currently, the reality of **widespread religious diversity** on a global scale raises a number of issues:

- the issue of one religion being **more correct and chosen** than others in the environment of religious diversity;
- the question of the **"more correct religion" having the sole say** (responsibility) in matters of eternal life and salvation;
- issues of religious **diversity** and religious **tolerance**;
- the issue of religious diversity and the **eternal destiny of mankind;**
- attitude to the issues of religious diversity in the processes of **public education and enlightenment**;

The listed issues reflect both academic-theoretical and practical realities.

1.1. The pervasiveness of religious diversity

At present, there are the following issues that cause striking differences between theistic and non-theistic religions.

a) According to the attitude towards the ***object of worship***. For instance, the ***monotheistic*** religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam agree that a **sole God exists**. **Hinduism**, by contrast, typically recognizes many gods and goddesses, although some varieties of Hinduism, which count these many deities as aspects of a single God, maybe monotheistic. Other strands of Hinduism are ***henotheistic***, worshiping one deity but recognizing many others.

b) Another striking difference between religions is the ***human person's views***. For example, in many forms of Christianity and Islam, the **ultimate goal is SUBJECTIVE IMMORTALITY in God's presence**. In some states of Eastern thought, for example, Theravada Buddhism, an **important goal is to understand that there is NO essential SELF.**

c) However, significant, widespread ***diversity*** also exists ***within basic theistic systems***. For example, within Christianity, believers differ significantly on the nature of God. Some see God as all-controlling, others as self-limiting, and still others as incapable of the principle of unilaterally controlling any aspect of reality. Or consider the wide variety of Muslim perspectives on such issues as the autonomy of the individual when interpreting the Qur'an, how best to apply core Islamic values to modern life, and the status of women. And we find equally pervasive, significant intra-system diversity in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Chinese Religions.

1.2. Possible responses to religious diversity

Despite all this, contemporary discussions of religious diversity contain a **realist theory** that claims to exist.

Theorists focus discussions of religious truth claims into three main categories: religious **exclusivism**, religious **non-exclusivism**, and religious **pluralism**.

- **Religious exclusivist** believes the religious perspective of only one basic theistic system or only one of the variants within a basic theistic system to be the truth or at least closer to the truth than any other religious perspective on this issue.
- Religious **non-exclusivist** denies that the religious perspective of any basic theistic system or variant thereof is superior to all other religious perspectives on this issue.
- Religious pluralist claims not only (as a non-exclusivist) that no specific religious perspective is superior but also makes a positive claim about the truth of the matter.

1.3. Religious diversity and religious tolerance

Religious intolerance, defined as the practice of keeping others from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs, is not new. However, there is a concern worldwide over the increasing amount, and increasingly violent nature, of such behavior. Accordingly, there is understandably a **renewed interest in fostering religiously tolerant environments** in which individuals with different religious perspectives can practice their faiths unencumbered.

1.4. Religious diversity and the eternal destiny of humankind

The eternal destiny of mankind, that is, who will be saved in the presence of God, in the matter of salvation, usually two directions are clearly visible in the history of thought:

a) Religious exclusivists.

Those who are **religious exclusivists** on this question claim that those, and only those, who have met the criteria set forth by one religious perspective can spend eternity in God’s presence.

b) Salvific pluralists.

Salvationist pluralists, who accept that any religion has no separate status as salvation, argue that the path to eternal existence with God can be without religion. All religions are equally susceptible to personal transformation.

At least according to theorists who prefer moral values to salvific exclusivism, it follows both from God's perfection and from conceptual truths about punishment that God does not punish those who are not morally culpable for their behavior.

1.5. Religious diversity in public education

Perhaps, however, there is a different, less controversial option for those educators who want to do more than simply encourage tolerance of expression and empathetic understanding. Is it not at least justifiable for the public school teacher to attempt to point out the important common values affirmed by most of the world’s major religions, values that we can all accept and should all desire to see lived out? Is it not justifiable for an educator to point out, for instance, that most of the world’s major religions prohibit such things as killing, lying, stealing, and sexual exploitation, and that these same religions encourage such things as helping those in need and treating adherents of other religions with respect. To do so, it has been argued, would not simply be of value within the classroom or community.

Since religious convictions clearly influence social, political, and economic activity on a global scale, emphasizing the shared common values of religions has the potential to facilitate better global relationships. And encourage such relationships is surely an appropriate goal of public education.